

July 28, 2003

Federal Communications Commission
ATTN: Commission Secretary, Marlene Dortch
445 12th St. S.W., CY-B402
Washington, D.C. 20554

FCC Proceeding: Docket No. 03-167

Dear Commissioners:

With competition continuing to grow in the telecommunications sector, it is important that our local phone company be allowed to compete on a level playing field. I support SBC's application to provide long distance service in the State of Ohio.

At the Muskingum County Port Authority we are in the business of economic development...in retaining existing jobs and in attracting new ones. All businesses today want to know about the community's telecommunications capabilities. With technology advancing so rapidly, this has become a key factor in site location decisions. Having SBC as a local economic development partner has been and continues to be an asset for our region. SBC makes significant investments annually in their facilities that serve this area, about \$15.4 million in Muskingum County over the past couple of years.

As this company continues to invest, contribute and provide good-paying jobs in our region, we certainly support their effort to provide the full range of telecommunications services in Ohio, just as others have that opportunity. Most of the new companies now offering phone services locally contribute little in the way of local investment, taxes paid, employment or community involvement and donations. The financial health of SBC directly contributes to the potential for economic growth in our community.

I urge you to move forward with approval of SBC's long distance entry.

Sincerely,

Larry Merry
Executive Director